

Multidisciplinary in tourism: designing cultural itineraries

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to reflect on several tourist research experiences carried out in an interdisciplinary context by teachers and students within the scope of the Tourist course.

This experience consisted in conceiving historical and cultural itineraries. The aim of these itineraries is to recuperate the heritage sites for locals and potential tourists, who are increasingly interested in knowing the local way of life based on their own self-interpretation.

The planning of the itineraries should be a means to promote the journey and return of the visitor, helping to guarantee a more complete, innovative and motivating experience. After working on organizing historic-heritage information on a particular area/site, its presentation should be attractive: the art of revealing the meanings of the cultural heritage and the culture to a public making use of their leisure time.

Key words: Heritage management, itineraries, teaching strategies, marketing.

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the diverse experiences of tourism research carried out in an interdisciplinary context by both teachers and students within the degree in Tourism. A further aim is to emphasize the importance of interdisciplinarity in the learning/teaching process in higher education alongside developing skills by the future regional guides. Interdisciplinarity is spoken of so much but is, in fact, implemented so little in higher education in Portugal. It leads not only to a more complete training of students, preparing them to interact with scarce information and build their own knowledge, but it also enables a deeper understanding of the actual specialized issues. It is up to the school to create the environment which shapes such skills by creating multidisciplinary research projects.

This practical/active teaching experiment consists of studying and designing a series of local cultural itineraries: urban, environmental, to monuments and museums, so as to recuperate these heritage sites for potential tourists as well as locals, and at the same time, provide students with specific tools to use as future regional or local tools guides.

We cannot forget that the tourists today are more well-informed and experienced. Generally speaking, they increasingly want to learn about the lifestyles of local populations from their own self-interpretation. This is where our concern stems from.

The planning of the itineraries by students is thus treated as an inherent part of managing heritage and destinations, which, on the one hand, will meet the needs and the desires of the visitor, and on the other to preserve and maintain those sites in terms of long-term sustainability. This is precisely the role proposed for the tour guide: a mediator between locals and guests.

The grouping of this research team sought to combine different disciplines: tourism, itineraries, heritage management and marketing, with a view to integrating complementary visions that con-

tribute to the originality of the theoretical outlines and empirical work to be done. The main objectives are as follows: to reflect on the potentiality of tourism in the region; to promote initiatives which enable the heritage to be preserved and promoted; to involve the community in order to raise its awareness to protecting cultural goods, as a civic duty; to share knowledge about the region resulting from research; to understand how property is used to objectify the sense of belonging and thereby edify an identity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Interdisciplinarity*

For us, education must be understood and approached in an interdisciplinary way in which the students are active agents, committed, responsible, capable of planning their course of action, take responsibility, take action based on the facts they have and interact with the environment they live in, thereby contributing to improving the teaching-learning process.

It is therefore the responsibility of teachers to make the students the subject of their learning, aware of what they will accomplish, why and how, that is, to lead the student to learn to plan, to work with hypotheses, and to find solutions.

To better understand interdisciplinary, it is necessary to examine the term. Thus, the prefix “inter” means an intermediate position or action, the suffix “ity” provides the sense of action or result of the action of the term.

For Ferreira (1999: 22), “Interdisciplinarity is an attitude. That is, it is a manifestation of a worldview.”

Interdisciplinarity emerged in the 1970s as a response to the need of a more integrated approach to reality. Although it is often associated with the projects which are only apparently or pseudo-interdisciplinary in the area of education, it stems from the assumption that, through it, it is possible to overcome the problems arising from excessive specialization, contributing to connecting knowledge and practice (Dencker, 2002).

For us, interdisciplinarity presupposes an integrating axis, which may be an intervention plan as it emerged from the need felt by the school, by us and by the students to explain, to understand, to intervene, to move, something that would challenge their understanding of subjects as an interconnected whole.

2.2 *Historical-Cultural Itineraries and Interpretation*

Pereiro (2008) observes that from an experiential perspective of cultural tourism we can understand cultural tourism as an experience of consuming images, places, activities and cultural heritage but also as an experience of asymmetrical contact or not, acculturating or not, between hosts and guests, being applicable to itineraries.

For a number of years the need for tourist itineraries which would allow tourists greater proximity and knowledge of the natural, historical and monumental values situated within the designated area they visit has been noted. As an itinerary is a description and direction of a route indicating all of the details of places to be visited itinerant tourist can be regarded as that kind of tourist who moves according to a given route. An itinerary may be defined as a description of a path or route specifying the places through which it passes and proposing a number of activities and services throughout its duration. Planning is thus justified so that it constitutes a crucial tool in tourism in general and tourist itineraries in particular.

To plan an itinerary, we must take into account greater or lesser physical demands (e.g., if it is completely or partially on foot), the area (urban, rural, mountain), duration (one hour, a few hours, a day, several days...), the type of participants, and other aforementioned variables. These details and demands on preparing the plan are different.

And if by tourist itinerary usually means: a route of travel or the outline of a proposal, since visitors increasingly like to plan their own trips, the itinerary also helps independent visitors choose cultural points of interest more easily. Tabata (2007) clearly states that “suggested itineraries can be very helpful for independent travellers once they arrive at their destination. Traditionally, self-guiding pamphlets and guides serve this purpose. Itinerary development can be a

powerful tool in organizing information about an area's attractions and presenting that information to visitors in an appealing manner. In tourism, this could be called 'tourism product development.'

Thus, itineraries can be a very important tool for organizing information on local attractions and present the information in a captivating way. And what is this if not interpretation? Tilden (2006) defines interpretation as "an educational activity (later changed to recreational) whose aim is to reveal meanings and interrelationships through the use of original objects, by direct contact with recourse to or use of means of interpretation, not limited merely to giving information on the facts."

Morales (2001) states that interpretation of heritage can be defined as a presentation strategy of the heritage which uses a set of communication techniques to facilitate the interaction between heritage and society. Indeed, interpretive planning is perfectly suited to develop cultural itineraries and interpretation could contribute to the development of itineraries in a variety of ways (Tabata, 2007) (Figure1).

i. It focuses attention on the target as a "whole" rather than being limited to locations and attractions and individually; most destinations fail to display a message on as a 'whole', and instead, tend to dazzle visitors with 'chunks.' This is particularly the case in rural communities with limited profits and marketing departments that need help in creating attractive destinations based on natural and cultural resources.

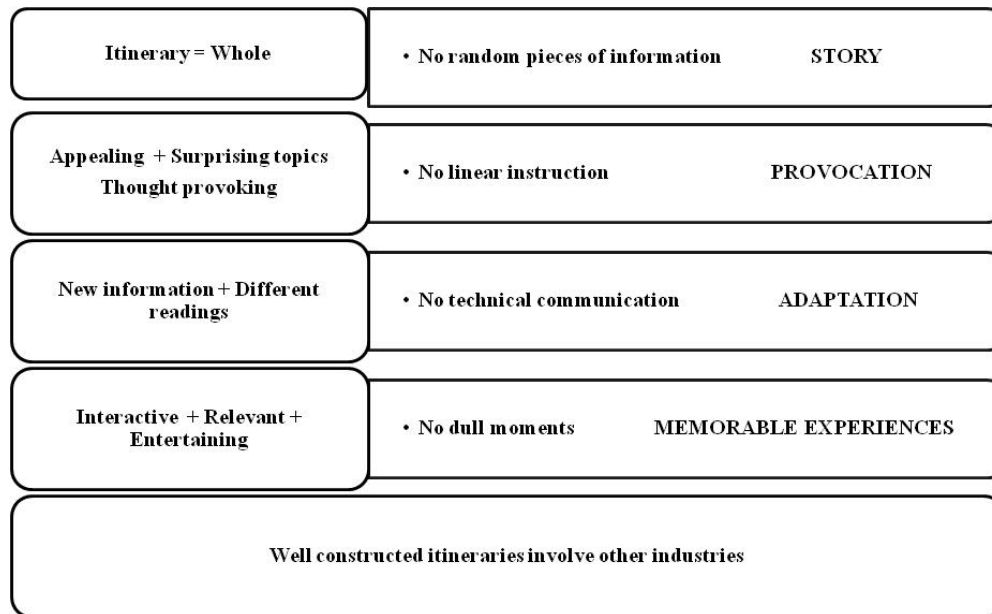
ii. It develops appealing themes to potential visitors; interpretation can no doubt be a very useful tool to help these communities. In order to make this possible, it is necessary to take into account the theme to be developed in the target area so as to captivate and astound the visitor.

iii. It offers a way for visitors to find what they need; it provides and recommends routes for visitors; the use of new systems which will help the tourist to have a unique feeling for the area is also one of the ways that can contribute to the development of itineraries.

iv. It increases retention, promoting the interest to visitors and providing memorable experiences which offer more opportunities for regular stops so that visitors may enjoy interesting landscapes, historical sites and natural areas, instead of using the motorway which does not provide specific observations.

v. Finally, investment in itineraries supports other industries and businesses such as souvenir shops and restaurants. It helps maintain and create other industries and local services.

Figure 1. Relationship between itineraries and interpretation



3 METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

Tourism knowledge has been generally characterized by case studies, area-specific discussions, best practice examples (Carter, Baxter & Hockings, 2001; Dartnall & Store, 1990; Hall, Williams & Lew, 2004). The Alto Douro Wine Region, classified as World Heritage Site since December 2001, has unique characteristics including its people, climate, culture and heritage. It is an area of unique beauty that combines the human work and cultural values creating an incomparable landscape which is internationally recognized. The Douro Region, which produces the famous “Port” and “Douro” wines, covers an area encompassing several municipalities, including Lamego. This is a noble city which possesses manor houses, churches and chapels of matchless value, an imposing castle, and where the architecture of the age-old monuments and streets recount stories of a bold people.

This study bring together a variety of proposals for itineraries the diverse historic resources of the city of Lamego, trying to make them easy to create, so that, in a short time (about an hour) the visitor can have an idea of the quality of what is on offer at various levels, and at the same time instill the desire to return with more time, or possibly prolong the visit. The aim is therefore to create itineraries which can simultaneously be guided or self-guided so that tourists can come into contact with the best that the city has to offer by themselves in terms of heritage and, to a certain extent, discover picturesque details which are part of the intangible realm and of the local collective imagination.

We kept in mind what Stone (2005) refers to as the “Power of Place” by emphasizing its meanings, which are usually invisible, by simply visiting the buildings, even if they themselves retain a special power and a resonance of memories.

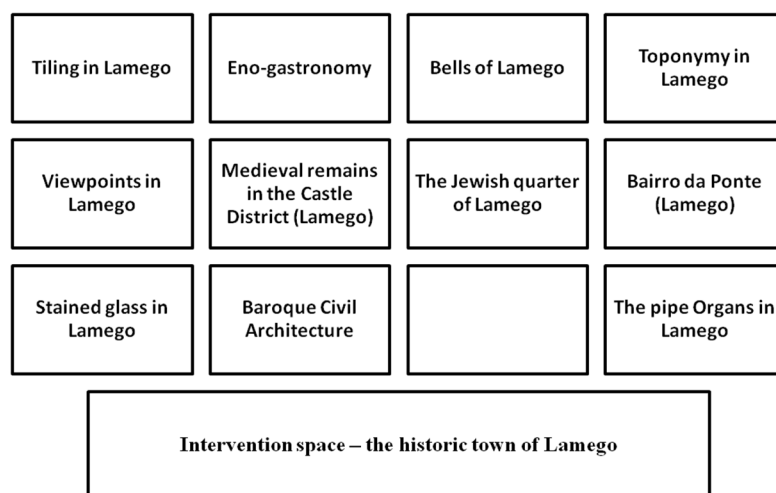
Goodey (2005) considers that “urban growth and morphology are most noticeable in smaller cities where the language of buildings and their age maintain some consistency.” We think this is the case with Lamego, and in exploring this aspect we could contribute to preserving this essence of “power of place” for future generations which we previously mentioned, using interpretation as “a process that adds value to the experience of the place” (ibid.).

The aim of this project is to bring together, in a variety of proposals for itineraries the diverse historic resources of the city of Lamego, trying to make them easy to create, so that, in a short time (about an hour) the visitor can have an idea of the quality of what is on offer at various levels, and at the same time instill the desire to return with more time, or possibly prolong the visit. The aim is therefore to create itineraries which can simultaneously be guided or self-guided so that

tourists can come into contact with the best that the city has to offer by themselves in terms of heritage and, to a certain extent, discover picturesque details which are part of the intangible realm and of the local collective imagination.

The themes of the itineraries join heritage and history, and the entire wine image as the region's potential, but we think it is still greatly under developed, or on the other hand, it is not sufficiently “commodified”: bells, façades, baroque art, local cuisine, historical figures, legends, quarters, observation points, etc. (Figure 1).

Figure 2. Thematic itineraries in the historic town of Lamego



Besides selecting the main sites which underlie the chosen theme, it is necessary to research about specific interest areas so as to avoid dull or long silent moments along the route. For these points, which we call intermediate or secondary points, we have tried to join a strong intangible component and interpretation to the tangible components mentioned above, taking into account the sector's current challenges and concepts related to the “new tourist”.

In order to make their work more complete, students also go on to write up an itinerary mentioning both the route and the main characteristics of the places to visit, but where they include other suggestions for visits and try to promote local products. Locals agents are involved and street corner shops and businesses are promoted including restaurants, cafés and pastry shops, which is very important so as to create added value for local people.

Later, the students presented their itineraries, not only to their classmates, as part of their practice and as the teachers’ assessment as well as their own self-assessment, but also to other students in the school and other interested visitors.

In this final stage the real applicability of interdisciplinarity and the connection of local heritage with the role of future tourist informers are felt. From the beginning of 2000 some forms of heritage tourism, such as visiting historic cities, are now forms of mass tourism – heritage tourism changed to ‘cultural’ tourism with the aim to search for authenticity and insight, to consume of difference and of the extraordinary, desire for self-delusion (Prentice, 2003). Therefore, guides, site interpreters being the front line for sightseeing, the ones who provide commentary and make visitors feel welcome at a specific destination, (Omar et al., 1998) need a certain level of education within the tourism sector – in order to make the identity and image of places certain.

4 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Before guaranteeing a thematic association between the subjects of tourism, itineraries, heritage management and marketing, this interdisciplinary work will seek unity in terms of teaching

practice. In our proposal, this common teaching practice is focused on constantly working toward the development of skills and abilities considering the overall development of the student and lifelong learning with a view to maximize synergies between training needs and what is offered with an integration of the student in the community and the job market.

Using a methodology of carrying out interdisciplinary work, we have tried to promote students' knowledge and awareness regarding the cultural heritage of the region where they study, so that they will be able to promote it.

This work provides opportunities for future guides to come into contact with the study of heritage, its connection to the present English practice, all in a single project. This will be essential in their future lives and work experience. These interdisciplinary activities place more responsibility on students and give them a greater commitment to their work, critical thinking and autonomy.

We believe our role today is to prepare students for the professional world through interdisciplinary activities that make them realize how they can organize their own knowledge to meet the demands of the market when they finish school.

Tourist itineraries are an essential tool for local development. Through tourism they may foster a city socially, economically and culturally. The itineraries could be a very low cost means of achieving very high profitability through the indirect generation of wealth. Therefore, we consider the guide's training and awareness of the utmost importance, as human resource and product working in the cooperation between locals and visitors.

With this methodology applied to designing itineraries, future guides will become aware that they must attend to cultural values, historical memory, history, cultural heritage and the multiple identities of a territory and that, after this organize historical-heritage information of an area/location. They must then make its presentation attractive: this is the art of their chosen profession.

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